Fortunetelling

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There are among mankind, people who claim knowledge of the unseen and the future. They are known by various names, among them: fortune-teller, soothsayer, foreseer, augur, magician, prognosticator, oracle, astrologer, palmist, etc. Fortune-tellers use various methods and mediums from which they claim to extract their information, among them: reading tea-leaves, drawing lines, writing numbers, palm-reading, casting horoscopes, crystal ball gazing, rattling bones, throwing sticks, etc.

Practitioners of occult arts, which claim to reveal the unseen and predict the future, can be divided into two main categories:

1. Those who have no real knowledge or secrets but depend on telling their customers about general incidences which happen to most people. They often go through a series of meaningless rituals, then make calculatedly general guesses. Some of their guesses, due to their generality, usually come true. Most people tend to remember the few predictions that come true and quickly forget the many which do not. This tendency is a result of the fact that after some time all the predictions tend to become half-forgotten thoughts in the subconscious until something happens to trigger their recall. For example, it has become a common practice in North America to publish, at the beginning of each year the various predictions of famous fortune-tellers. When a survey was taken of the various predictions for the year 1980, it was found that the most accurate fortune-teller among them was only 24% accurate in her predictions!

2. The second group are those who have made contact with the Jinn. This group is of most importance because it usually involves the grave sin of Shirk, and those involved often tend to be highly accurate in their information and thus present a real Fitnah (temptations) for both Muslims and non-Muslims alike.

World of the Jinn

Some people have attempted to deny the reality of the Jinn about whom the Qur'an has devoted a whole chapter, Soorah al-Jinn (72). By relying on the literal meaning of the word Jinn which comes from the verb Janna, Yajunnu: "to cover, hide or conceal", they claim that the word Jinn really refers to "clever foreigners". Others have even stated that a Jinn is a human who does not have a true mind in his head but he has a fiery nature. But, the reality is that the Jinn represent another creation of Allaah, which co-exists with man on the earth. Allaah created the Jinn before He created mankind, and He also used a different set of elements than those used for man. Allaah said: "Verily we created man from dried clay, from black putrid mud. And we created the Jinn before that from a fiery wind." (Surah al-Hijr 15:26)

They were named Jinn because they are hidden from the eyes of mankind. Iblees (Satan) is from the world of the Jinn, even though he was among the angels when they were commanded by Allaah to prostrate to Adam. When he refused to prostrate and was asked why, Allaah said: "He said, 'I am better than he is. You (Allah) created me from fire and You created him from clay!" (Surah Saad; 38:76)

'Aa'esha reported that the Prophet (pbuh) said, "The angels were created from light and the Jinn from smokeless fire." (Sahih Muslim)

Allaah also said, "And when We told the angels to prostrate to Adam, they all prostrated except Iblees. He was of the Jinn." (Surah al-Kahf, 18:50)

Therefore it is incorrect to consider him a fallen angel or the like.

The Jinn may first be divided into three broad categories in relation to their modes of existence. The Prophet (pbuh) said: "There are three types of Jinn: One type which flies in the air all the time, another type which exists as snakes and dogs, and an earthbound type which resides in one place or wanders about. " (At-Tabaree and al-Haakim)

The Jinn may be further divided into two categories in relationship to their faith: Muslims (believers) and Kaafirs (disbelievers). Allaah refers to the believing Jinn in Soorah al-Jinn as follows: "Say: It has been revealed to me that a group of Jinn listened and said, 'Verily we have heard a marvellous Qur'an. It guides unto righteousness so we have believed in it. And, we will never make partners with our Lord. He, may our Lord's glory be exalted, has not taken a wife nor a son. What the foolish ones among us used to say about Allaah is a horrible lie."(Surah al-Jinn 72:1-4)

"And there are among us Muslims and others who are unjust. Whoever accepts Islam has sought out the right path. As for those who are unjust, they will be fuel for the Hell fire." (Surah Jinn 72:14)

The disbelievers among the Jinn are referred to by various names in both Arabic and English: 'Ifreet, Shaytaan, Qareen, demons, devils, spirits, ghosts, etc. They try to misguide man in various ways. Whoever listens to them and becomes a worker for them is referred to as human Shaytaan (devil).

Allaah said: "Likewise, we have made for every Prophet an enemy, Shaytaans from among mankind and the Jinn. (Surah al-An'aam 6:112)

Every human has an individual Jinn accompanying him referred to as a Qareen (i.e. companion). This is a part of man's test in this life. The Jinn encourage his lower desires and constantly try to divert him from righteousness. The Prophet (pbuh) referred to this relationship as follows, "Everyone of you has been assigned a companion from the Jinn. " The Sahaabah asked, "Even you, O Messenger of Allaah?" And the Prophet replied, "Even me, except that Allaah has helped me against him and he has submitted. Now he only tells me to do good."(Muslim)

Prophet Sulaymaan (Solomon) was given miraculous control over the Jinn, as a sign of his prophethood. Allaah said: "And, we gathered for Sulaymaan his army from the Jinn, mankind and the birds." (Surah an-Naml 27:17) and they were all kept in order and ranks.

But this power was not given to anyone else. No one else is allowed to control the Jinn and no one can. The Prophet said, "Verily an 'Ifr-eeit from among the Jinn spat on me last night trying to break my Salaah. However Allaah let me overpower him and I wanted to tie him to one of the columns in the masjid so that you all could see him in the morning. Then, I remembered my brother Sulaymaan's prayer: 'Oh my Lord, forgive me and bestow on me a kingdom not allowed to anyone after me.' (Surah Saad 38:35) (Al-Bukhari and Muslim)

Man cannot gain control over the Jinn as this was a special miracle given only to Prophet Sulaymaan. In fact, contact with the Jinn in circumstances other than possession, or accident is most often made by the performance of sacrilegious acts despised and forbidden in the religion. The evil Jinn summoned in this fashion may aid their partners in sin and disbelief in God. Their goal is to draw as many others as they can into the gravest of sins, the worship of others besides or along with God.

Once contact and contract with the Jinn are made by fortune-tellers, the Jinn may inform them of certain events in the future. The Prophet (pbuh) described how the Jinn gather information about the future. He related that the Jinn were able to travel to the lower reaches of the heavens and listen in on some of the information about the future, which the angels pass among themselves. They would then return to the earth and feed the information to their human contacts.(Bukhari and Muslim) This used to happen a lot prior to the prophethood of Muhammad (pbuh) and fortune-tellers were very accurate in their information. They were able to gain positions in the royal courts and enjoyed much popularity and were even worshipped in some regions of the world.

After the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) began his mission the situation changed. Allaah had the angels guard the lower reaches of the heavens carefully, and most of the Jinn were chased away with meteors and shooting stars. Allaah described this phenomena in the following Qur'anic statement made by one of the Jinn, "We (the Jinn) had sought out the heavens but found it filled with strong guardians and meteors. We used to sit on high places in order to listen, but whoever listens now finds a flame waiting for him."'

Allaah also said, "And We have guarded it (the heavens) from every cursed devil, except the one who is able to snatch a hearing and, he is pursued by a brightly burning flame."(Surah al-Hijr 15:17)

Ibn 'Abbaas said, "When the Prophet and a group of his companions set out for the Ukaadh market, the devils were blocked from hearing information in the heavens. Meteors were let loose on them, so they returned to their people. When their people asked what happened, they told them. Some suggested that something must have happened, so they spread out over the earth seeking the cause. Some of them came across the Prophet and his companions while they were in Salaah and they heard the Qur'an. They said to themselves that this must have been what blocked them from listening. When they returned to their people they told them, 'Verily we have heard a

marvellous Qur'an. It guides unto righteousness so we believed in it. And we will never make partners with our Lord.' (Al-Bukhari, Muslim, Tirmidhi and Ahmad)

Thus, the Jinn could no longer gather information about the future as easily as they could before the Prophet's (pbuh) mission. Because of that, they now mix their information with many lies. The Prophet said: "They (the Jinn) would pass the information back down until it reaches the lips of a magician fortune-teller. Sometimes a meteor would overtake them before they could pass it on. If they passed it on before being struck, they would add to it a hundred lies." (Al-Bukhari and Tirmidhi)

'Aa'eshah reported that when she asked Allaah's messenger (pbuh) about fortune-tellers, he replied that they were nothing. She then mentioned that the fortune-tellers sometimes told them things, which were true. The Prophet (pbuh) said: "That is a bit of truth which the Jinn steals and cackles in the ear of his friend; but he mixes along with it a hundred lies." (al-Bukhari, Muslim)

Once while 'Umar ibn al-Khattaab was sitting, a handsome man, Sawaad Ibn Qaarib passed by him. 'Umar said: "If I'm not wrong, this person is still following his religion of pre-Islamic times or perhaps he was one of their fortune-tellers." He ordered that the man be brought to him and asked him about, what he suspected. The man replied, "I have never seen a day like this where a Muslim is faced with such accusations." 'Umar said, "Verily I am determined that you should inform me." The man then said, "I was their fortune-teller in the time of ignorance." On hearing that 'Umar asked, "Tell me about the strangest thing which your female Jinn told you." The man then said, "One day, while I was in the market, she came to me all worried and said, 'Have you not seen the Jinns in their despair after their disgrace? And their following of she-camels and their riders." 'Umar interjected, "It is true." (Al-Bukhari)

The Jinns are also able to inform their human contact of the relative future. For example, when someone comes to a fortune-teller, the fortune-teller's Jinn gets information from the man's Qareen (the jinn assigned to every human being) of what plans he had made prior to his coming. So the fortune-teller is able to tell him that he will do this or that, or go here or there. By this method, the real fortune-teller is also able to learn about a stranger's past in vivid detail. He is able to tell a total stranger of his parents' names, where he was born, the acts of his childhood, etc. The ability to vividly describe the past is one of the marks of a true fortune-teller who has made contact with the Jinn. Because the Jinn are able to traverse huge distances instantaneously, they are also able to gather huge stores of information about hidden things, lost articles and unobserved events. Proof of this ability can be found in the Qur'an, in the story about Prophet Sulaymaan and Bilqees, the Queen of Sheba. When Queen Bilqees came to see him, he asked the Jinn to bring her throne from her land. "An Ilfreet from among the Jinns said, I will bring it for you before you can get up from your place. Verily, I am strong and trustworthy for the assignment.(Surah an-Naml)

The Islamic Ruling on Fortune-telling

Because of the sacrilege and heresy involved in fortune telling, Islam has taken a very strong stance towards it. Islam opposes any form of association with those who practice fortune-telling, except to advise them to give up their forbidden practices.

Visitation of Fortune-tellers

The Prophet (pbuh) laid down principles, which clearly forbade any form of visitation of fortune-tellers. Safiyyah reported from Hafsah (wife of the Prophet) that the Prophet (pbuh) said, "The Salaah of whoever approaches a fortune-teller and asks him about anything will not be accepted for 40 days and nights."(Muslim) The punishment in this Hadeeth is for simply approaching a fortune-teller and asking him questions out of curiosity. This prohibition is further supported by Mu'aawiyah Ibn al-Hakam asSalamee's Hadeeth in which he said, "O Messenger of Allaah, verily there are some people among us who visit oracles. " The Prophet (pbuh) replied, "Do not go to them". Such a severe punishment has been assigned for only visitation because it is the first step to belief in fortune-telling. If one went there doubtful about its reality, and some of the fortune-teller's predictions come true, one will surely become a true devotee of the fortune-teller and an ardent believer in fortune-telling. The individual who approaches a fortune-teller is still obliged to make his compulsory Salaah throughout the 40 day period, even though he gets no reward from his prayers. If he abandons the Salaah all together, he has committed another major sin. This is similar to the Islamic ruling in the case of Salaah on or in stolen property, according to the majority of Jurists. They hold that whenever obligatory Salaah is performed, it produces two results under normal circumstances:

1. It removes the obligation of that prayer from the individual.
2. It earns him a reward.

If Salaah is performed on or in stolen property it removes the obligation of Salaah, but it is devoid of reward. Consequently, the Prophet forbade praying the same obligatory prayers twice.

Belief in Fortune-tellers

The Islamic ruling with regard to anyone who visits a fortune-teller believing that he knows the unseen and the future is that of Kufr (disbelief). Abu Hurayrah and al-Hasan both reported from the Prophet (pbuh) that he said, "Whosoever approaches a fortune-teller and believes what he says, has disbelieved in what was revealed to Muhammad. Such a belief assigns to creation some of Allaah's attributes with regard to the knowledge of the unseen and the future. Consequently, it destroys Tawheed alAsmaa was-Sifaat, and represents a form of Shirk in this aspect of Tawheed.

The ruling of Kufr includes, by analogy (Qiyaas), those who read the books and writings of fortune-tellers, listen to them on the radio or watch them on the T. V., as, these are the most common means used by 20th century fortune-tellers to spread their predictions.

Allaah clearly states in al-Qur'an that no one knows the unseen besides Him. Not even the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). Allaah said: With Him are the keys to the unseen and none knows it except Him alone."

Then he told the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), "Say! I have no power to bring good to myself nor avert harm but it is only as Allah wills. If it were that I knew the unseen, I would have multiplied the good and no evil would have touched me."

And he also said: "Say! None in the heavens nor the earth knows the 'unseen except Allah'."

Therefore, all the various methods used around the world by oracles, fortune-tellers, and the likes, are forbidden to Muslims.

Palm-reading, I-Ching, fortune cookies, tea leaves as well as Zodiacal signs and Bio-rhythm computer programs, all claim to inform those who believe in them about their future. However, Allaah has stated in no uncertain terms that He alone knows the future: "Verily the knowledge of the Hour is with Allaah alone. It is He who sends down the rain and knows the contents of the wombs. No one knows what he will earn tomorrow nor in which land he will die, but Allaah is all-knowing and aware."(Surah Luqmaan 31:34)

Therefore, Muslims must take utmost care in dealing with books, magazines, newspapers as well as individuals who, in one way or another, claim knowledge of the future or the unseen. For example, when a Muslim weather-man predicts rain, snow, or other climatic conditions for tomorrow he should add the phrase, "In ShaaAllaah (If Allaah so wishes)". Likewise, when the Muslim doctor informs her patient that she will deliver a child in 9 months or on such and such a day, she should take care to add the phrase "In ShaaAllaah", as such statements are only estimations based on statistical information.